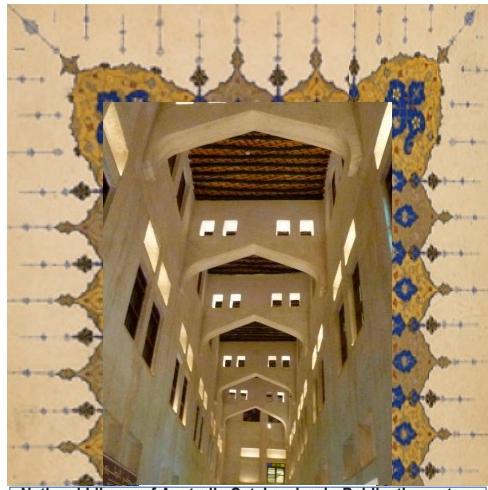


Proverbs 1: 21 She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, 22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? 23 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. 3: 7 Be not wise in thine own eyes. 8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. 4: 5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. 6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. 7 Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom, and in **Song** thou shalt in **Song** understand. 8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: She shall bring thee to honour, O **ben** **So****lo****m**ononace her. 9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. 9: 9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. 10 Respect for integration is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. 15: 17 Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than ~~poetic interpretation~~ a fatred therewith. 16 How much better is it to get wisdom than gold, and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver! 18: 1 Through desire a man hath separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom. 19: 8 He that getteth wisdom loveth his soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good. 22: 17 Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. 23: 9 Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.



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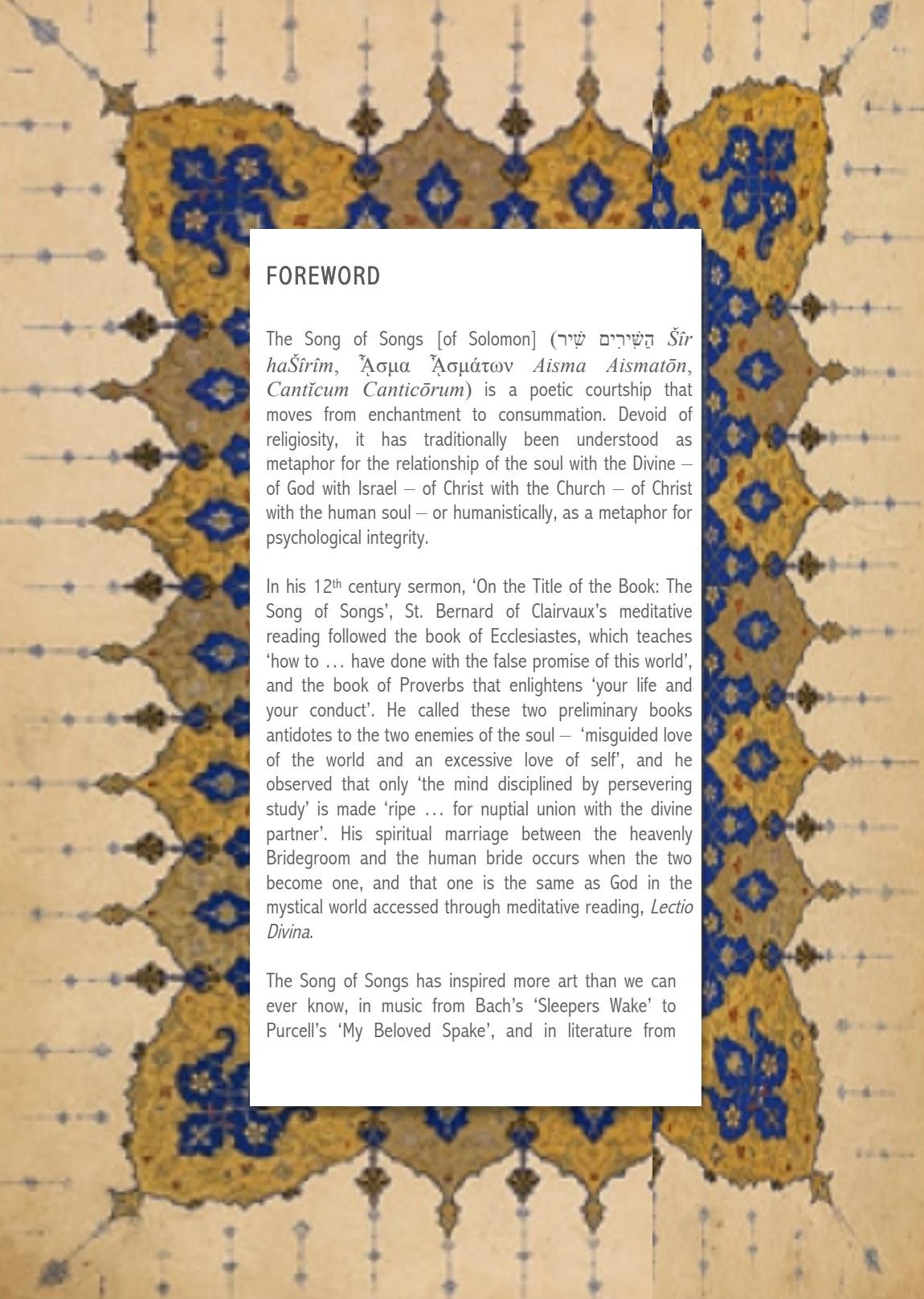
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Subjects: Bible. O.T. Song of Solomon - Adaptations.

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Images: border, pages 5, 7, 10, 12, 15, 17 and 20 – State Library of Victoria and Bodleian Library web display of ‘Love and Devotion’ exhibition; page 2 inner image – from photograph of old souk Doha; page 23 and 25 – Leningrad Codex, the oldest complete copy of the Hebrew scriptures, cover and page from Exodus; page 28 – Lindisfarne Bible; page 29 – first letter of a chapter in Song of Songs from a Medieval bible; page 30 – unknown; back cover – St. Bernard’s Sermons on the Song of Songs.

*Proverbs: 4: 5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. 6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. 7 Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding. 8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. 9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.*



## FOREWORD

The Song of Songs [of Solomon] (שיר השירים Šîr haŠîrîm, Αἴσμα Αἴσματων Aisma Aismatōn, *Canticum Canticorum*) is a poetic courtship that moves from enchantment to consummation. Devoid of religiosity, it has traditionally been understood as metaphor for the relationship of the soul with the Divine – of God with Israel – of Christ with the Church – of Christ with the human soul – or humanistically, as a metaphor for psychological integrity.

In his 12<sup>th</sup> century sermon, ‘On the Title of the Book: The Song of Songs’, St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s meditative reading followed the book of Ecclesiastes, which teaches ‘how to ... have done with the false promise of this world’, and the book of Proverbs that enlightens ‘your life and your conduct’. He called these two preliminary books antidotes to the two enemies of the soul – ‘misguided love of the world and an excessive love of self’, and he observed that only ‘the mind disciplined by persevering study’ is made ‘ripe ... for nuptial union with the divine partner’. His spiritual marriage between the heavenly Bridegroom and the human bride occurs when the two become one, and that one is the same as God in the mystical world accessed through meditative reading, *Lectio Divina*.

The Song of Songs has inspired more art than we can ever know, in music from Bach’s ‘Sleepers Wake’ to Purcell’s ‘My Beloved Spake’, and in literature from



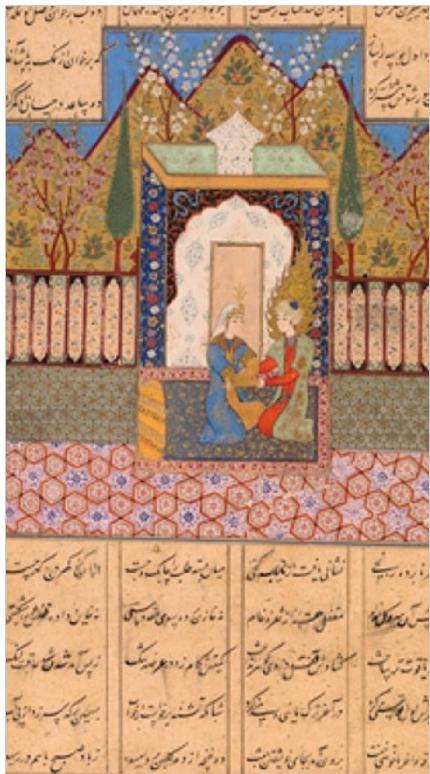
Chaucer's 'The Canterbury Tales' to Goethe's 'Faust'. The Song of Songs is also the favourite book of the title character in one of my favourite books, that of Nobel Laureate Sinclair Lewis – 'Elmer Gantry'.

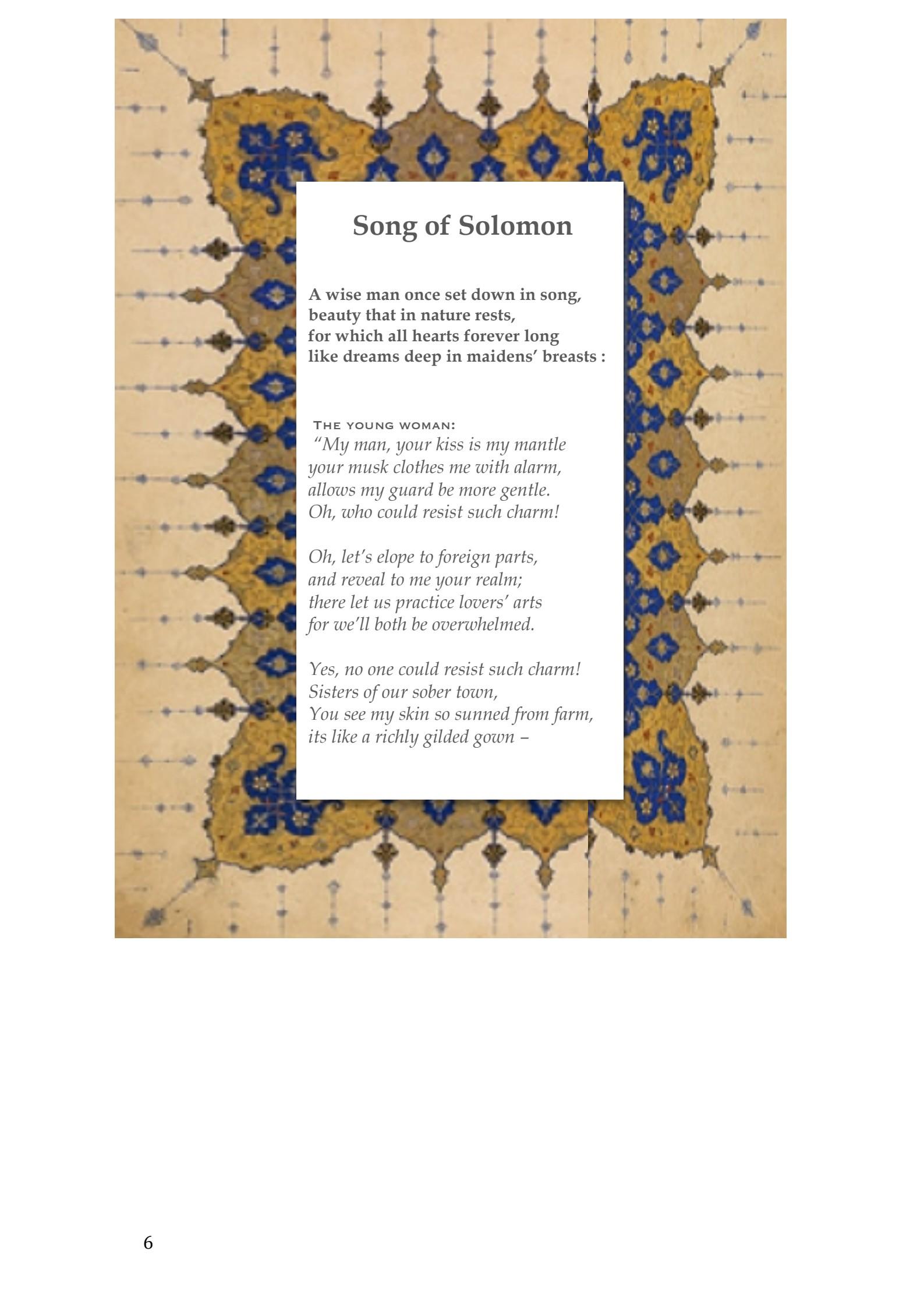
To me the Song of Songs unites the mystical traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, dispensing with trivial dogmatic and cultural differences in such beautiful metaphor that it is no surprise to find such imagery in these and all other religions, albeit often neglected or even denigrated by institutional religious bodies to 'protect' the ignorant.

Long noticed similarities of the Song of Songs with other Ancient Middle Eastern love poetry from Sumeria through Egypt, and beyond into Persia, continues today into modern Tamil literature. A recent exhibition of 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian and related manuscripts from the State Library of Victoria and the Bodleian Library in Oxford spurred me to render the similar but much more ancient Song of Songs into a rhyming poetic form. And as had Bernard, I first studied Ecclesiastes – rendering it into Buddhist thought through rhyming verse that was published as 'Pranja Anthology'. Consideration of the book of Proverbs concentrating on versus related to wisdom as in the background of the cover of this book then led to this poetic interpretation of the Song of Songs.

LF

Melbourne & Doha, 2012





## Song of Solomon

A wise man once set down in song,  
beauty that in nature rests,  
for which all hearts forever long  
like dreams deep in maidens' breasts :

THE YOUNG WOMAN:

*"My man, your kiss is my mantle  
your musk clothes me with alarm,  
allows my guard be more gentle.  
Oh, who could resist such charm!"*

*"Oh, let's elope to foreign parts,  
and reveal to me your realm;  
there let us practice lovers' arts  
for we'll both be overwhelmed."*

*"Yes, no one could resist such charm!  
Sisters of our sober town,  
You see my skin so sunned from farm,  
its like a richly gilded gown -"*

*a noble robe gifting my hue.  
Though born beyond your boudoir,  
underneath I'm the same as you.  
Why look down on my colour,*

*which sun with radiant health imbued  
when I with siblings laboured,  
growing grapes and farming food?  
That life makes me feel favoured!*

*Tell me, my love, where you will lay  
for its with you I belong  
so that I need not seek all day  
among flocking common throng."*



**THE YOUNG MAN:**

He replied: "Where I go you know,  
our love will lead my queen's feet,  
to where paradise overflows –  
in plenty we'll be replete.

*For you my mistress are to men  
as mare to noble stallion,  
hair bezewels your neck as a mane,  
bridled by golden garland."*

**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

And thus sparked, the lady replied:  
*"From scent you sense my presence  
and at the couch where you recline  
it moulds your manly essence.*

*Nesting all night my breasts between  
like bunchéd blooms of henna  
'midst verdant vines kissed by sea's sheen  
you're more to me than all men are."*

**THE YOUNG MAN:**

And he sighed responding inspired:  
*"Your soft eyes sparkle with love,  
of their beauty I scarce grow tired –  
soulful, serene like a dove's."*

**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

Swooning as she sang in return:  
*"Your form inflames my desire,  
your beautiful body I yearn –  
my heart with passion's afire.*

*Oh, let's lie in stately meadows  
'twix soaring stems of cedar  
and hold as to never let go  
'neath a roof of rugged fir.*

*I'll be flowers of the forest  
open to you like a rose,  
bashfully bowing to our nest;  
as valley lily I'd pose."*

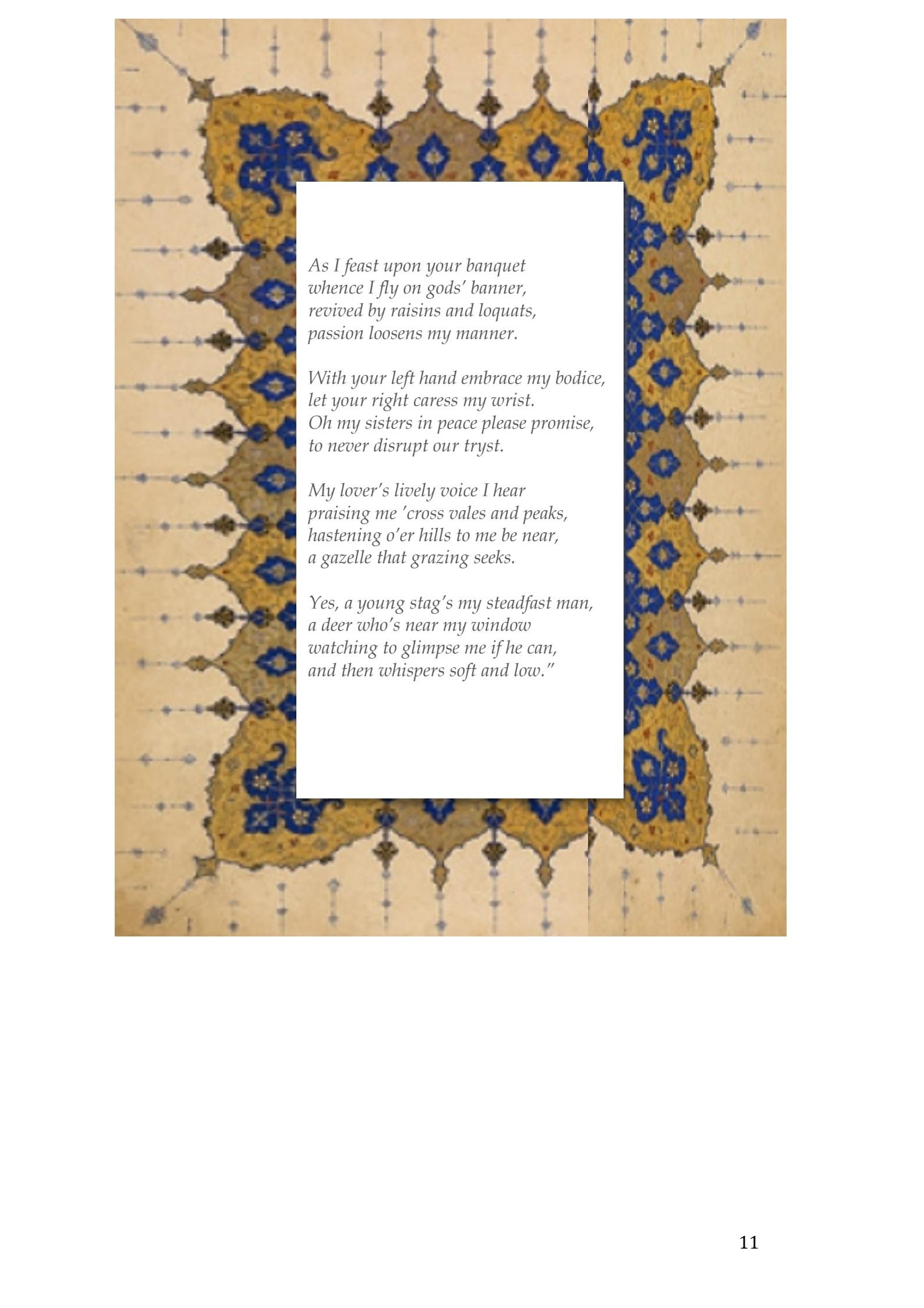
**THE YOUNG MAN:**

*"Ah my one love", he then whispers:  
"You're my beauty 'midst a briar;  
no wonder among the sisters,  
you joy and envy inspire."*



**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

*Thus bewitched, she blessed her lover:  
"My fruit tree in a forest  
sweet and safer than a brother,  
your succour and shade bode rest."*



*As I feast upon your banquet  
whence I fly on gods' banner,  
revived by raisins and loquats,  
passion loosens my manner.*

*With your left hand embrace my bodice,  
let your right caress my wrist.  
Oh my sisters in peace please promise,  
to never disrupt our tryst.*

*My lover's lively voice I hear  
praising me 'cross vales and peaks,  
hastening o'er hills to me be near,  
a gazelle that grazing seeks.*

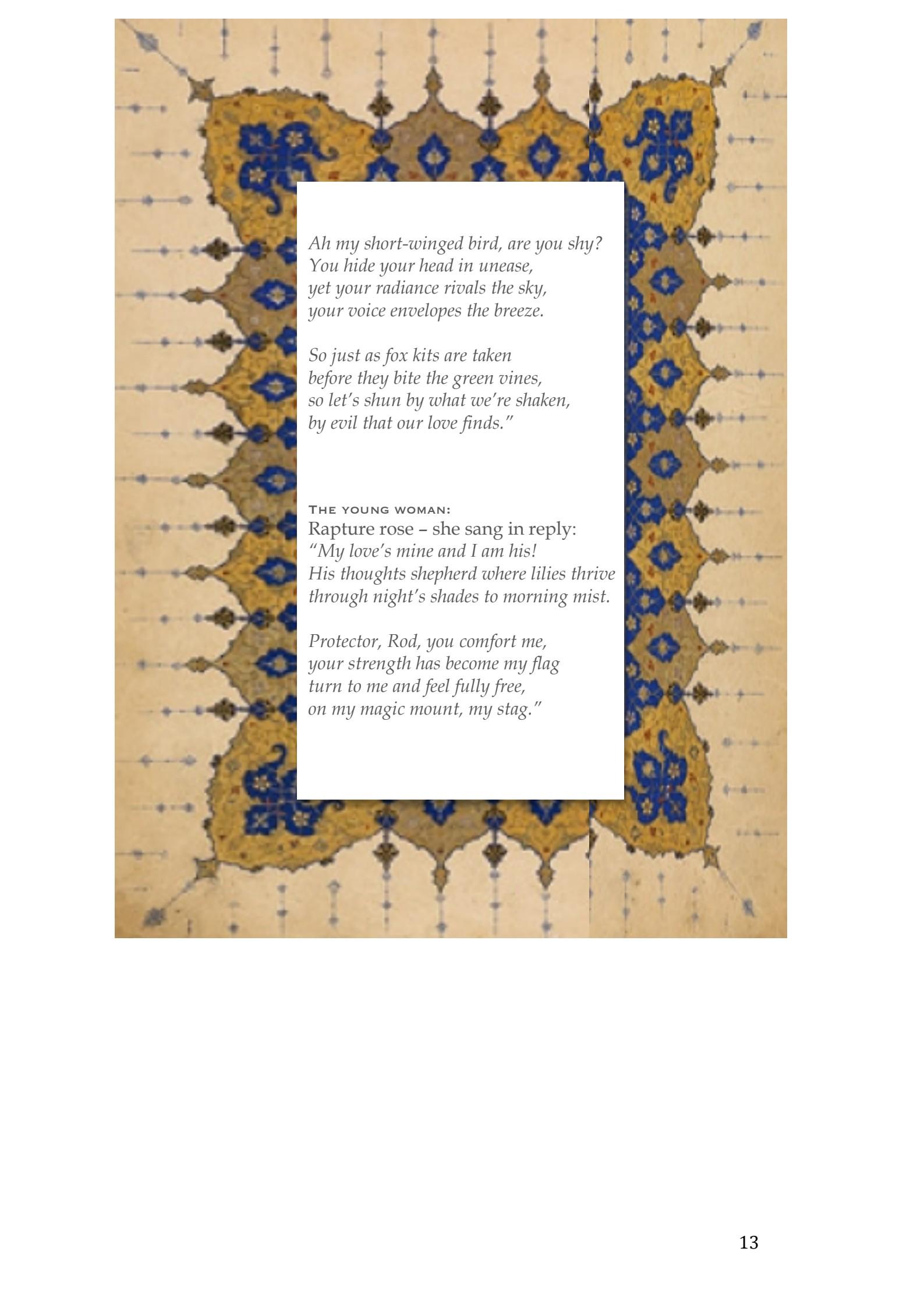
*Yes, a young stag's my steadfast man,  
a deer who's near my window  
watching to glimpse me if he can,  
and then whispers soft and low."*



THE YOUNG MAN:

And sotto voce he slowly sighs:  
*"Come flee with me mon amour,  
our winter's ceased, the sun is high  
and lights the blooms of the moor.*

*Lovebirds' lyrics fill the meadow,  
Spilling o'er with nature's spoor  
as figs fill, grapes glisten and glow -  
come flee with me mon amour!*



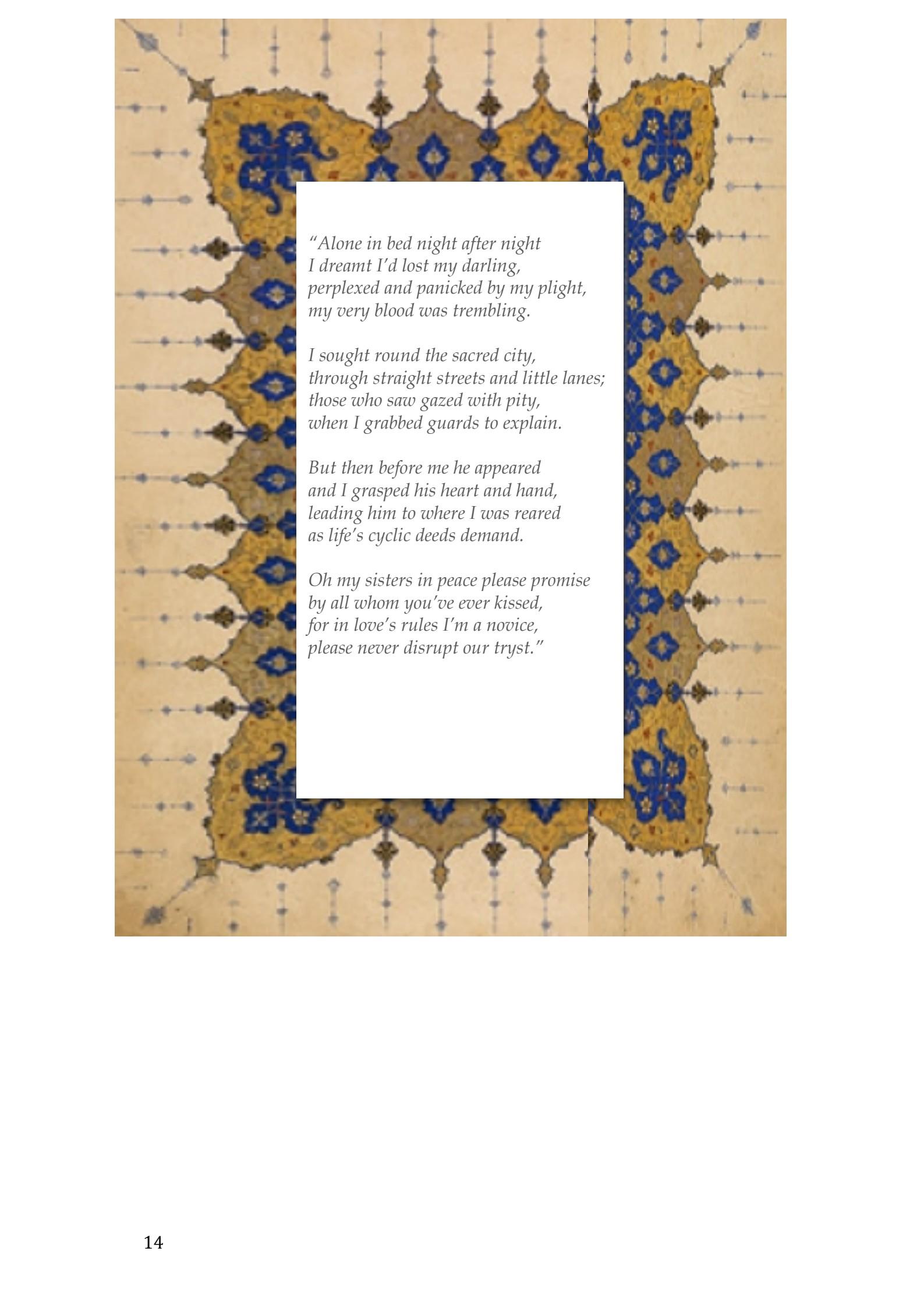
*Ah my short-winged bird, are you shy?  
You hide your head in unease,  
yet your radiance rivals the sky,  
your voice envelopes the breeze.*

*So just as fox kits are taken  
before they bite the green vines,  
so let's shun by what we're shaken,  
by evil that our love finds."*

**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

*Rapture rose – she sang in reply:  
"My love's mine and I am his!  
His thoughts shepherd where lilies thrive  
through night's shades to morning mist.*

*Protector, Rod, you comfort me,  
your strength has become my flag  
turn to me and feel fully free,  
on my magic mount, my stag."*



*"Alone in bed night after night  
I dreamt I'd lost my darling,  
perplexed and panicked by my plight,  
my very blood was trembling.*

*I sought round the sacred city,  
through straight streets and little lanes;  
those who saw gazed with pity,  
when I grabbed guards to explain.*

*But then before me he appeared  
and I grasped his heart and hand,  
leading him to where I was reared  
as life's cyclic deeds demand.*

*Oh my sisters in peace please promise  
by all whom you've ever kissed,  
for in love's rules I'm a novice,  
please never disrupt our tryst."*



Still in her dream she softly spoke:  
*"Look! what's on the horizon  
raising dust into swirls like smoke?  
He's striding to this maiden!"*

*My glimpse foreshadows his fragrance  
and overpowers my sight,  
for my prince's rising potence  
is blessed by goodness and might.*

*His throne is built of smooth cedar  
with pillows purple and gold,  
its supports encased in silver.  
Come sisters see love extolled."*

**THE YOUNG MAN:**

Her reverie had prince reply:  
"Love, your veil makes transparent,  
your hijab bejewels kid's eyes,  
gamboling round their parents.

Pure as pearls are your perfect teeth,  
white as washed sheep from shearing,  
boldly displaying health beneath  
lips so sensually searing.

Cheeks that call forth ripe grenadine  
on that slender towering poem  
your neck, a graceful swanlike scene  
described by grand dancing gems.

Gems that guard those gemini fawns,  
your breasts, browsing 'midst wildflowers;  
I'll linger on that mound of myrrh  
for its incense me empowers.

Perfect is my true love's beauty!  
Let's hasten to heaven's heights  
united in dharmic duty  
for your soft eyes so excite.



*Ah! Fair necklace that strokes your throat  
disarms me so I demure  
for as prime wine does lust promote,  
it strengthens your scent's allure.*

*Honey drips from your nectared lips,  
your tongue's tanged by fresh-gained milk  
the cedar's scent seeps from your hips,  
a garden guarded by silk.*



*That arbour hides a spritzéd spring  
to be dehisced to life's dance,  
a grenadine patch offering  
ripe fruits filled rich with fragrance.*

*Such bounty foretells fullfillment  
from wells watering bushes,  
awaking all that lay dormant  
washing through hills in gushes."*

**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

Gasping as a thrill passed through her  
*"Rude winds my prudence refute  
and waft my spices all over  
willing you to pluck my fruit."*

**THE YOUNG MAN:**

*"My bride"*, he replied *"from my cup  
I savour your must and milk  
and on your sweet syrup I sup."*  
Thus they both imbibed till drunk.

She slept and in that world she saw,  
damp from dew and moist from mist,  
her man, drawn to her door implore:  
*"open, my dove for my kiss".*

**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

*"But I am bathed and for bed dressed.  
I'll rise?" She asked heart burning.  
To her portal his firm palm pressed,  
his nearness fostered yearning.*

*"I prepared to let him inside,  
my body bathed in balsam,  
loosed the hasp, cast caution aside –  
my lover I would welcome.*

*But next, my desire was dampened,  
as if he was never there;  
he had knocked and I had opened,  
sad I search but know not where.*

*Now crazed I hastened to the night  
where rude guards patrol the dark;  
who proceeded to punish my plight,  
they tear my headscarf apart.*

*Oh my sisters in peace please promise,  
should you behold my belovéd,  
you'll tell him I flower like a lotus  
yet am by passion made pallid."*

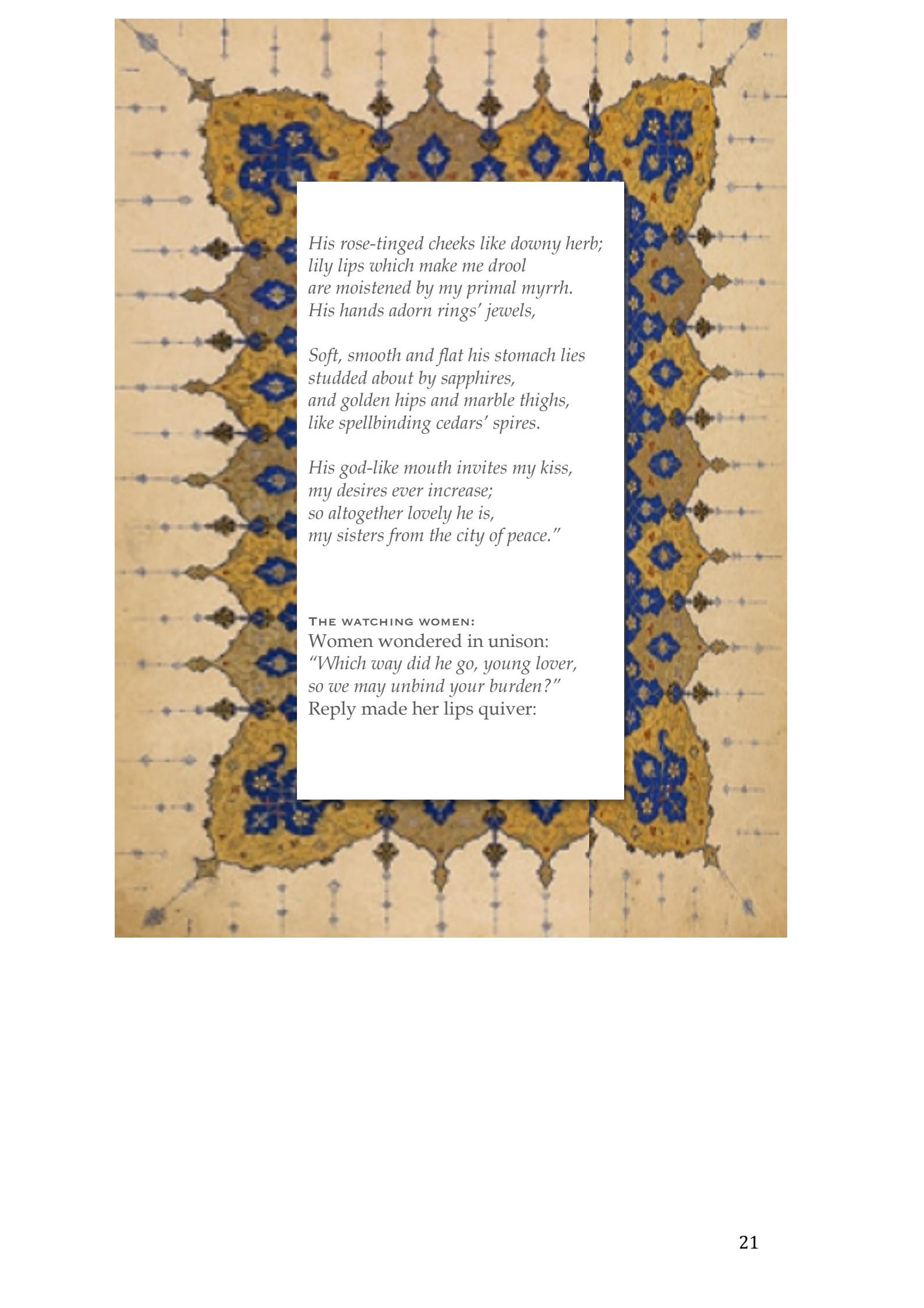
**THE WATCHING WOMEN:**

Of women I dreamt in chorus:  
*"Young girl, why should this lover  
provoke us to such a promise –  
does he differ from others?"*



**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

She sang: *"Oh who with him compares!  
My man's one in a million,  
bronzed and bare, slight wave in his hair,  
eyes where doves rest in union."*



*His rose-tinged cheeks like downy herb;  
lily lips which make me drool  
are moistened by my primal myrrh.  
His hands adorn rings' jewels,*

*Soft, smooth and flat his stomach lies  
studded about by sapphires,  
and golden hips and marble thighs,  
like spellbinding cedars' spires.*

*His god-like mouth invites my kiss,  
my desires ever increase;  
so altogether lovely he is,  
my sisters from the city of peace."*

**THE WATCHING WOMEN:**

Women wondered in unison:  
*"Which way did he go, young lover,  
so we may unbind your burden?"*  
Reply made her lips quiver:

**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

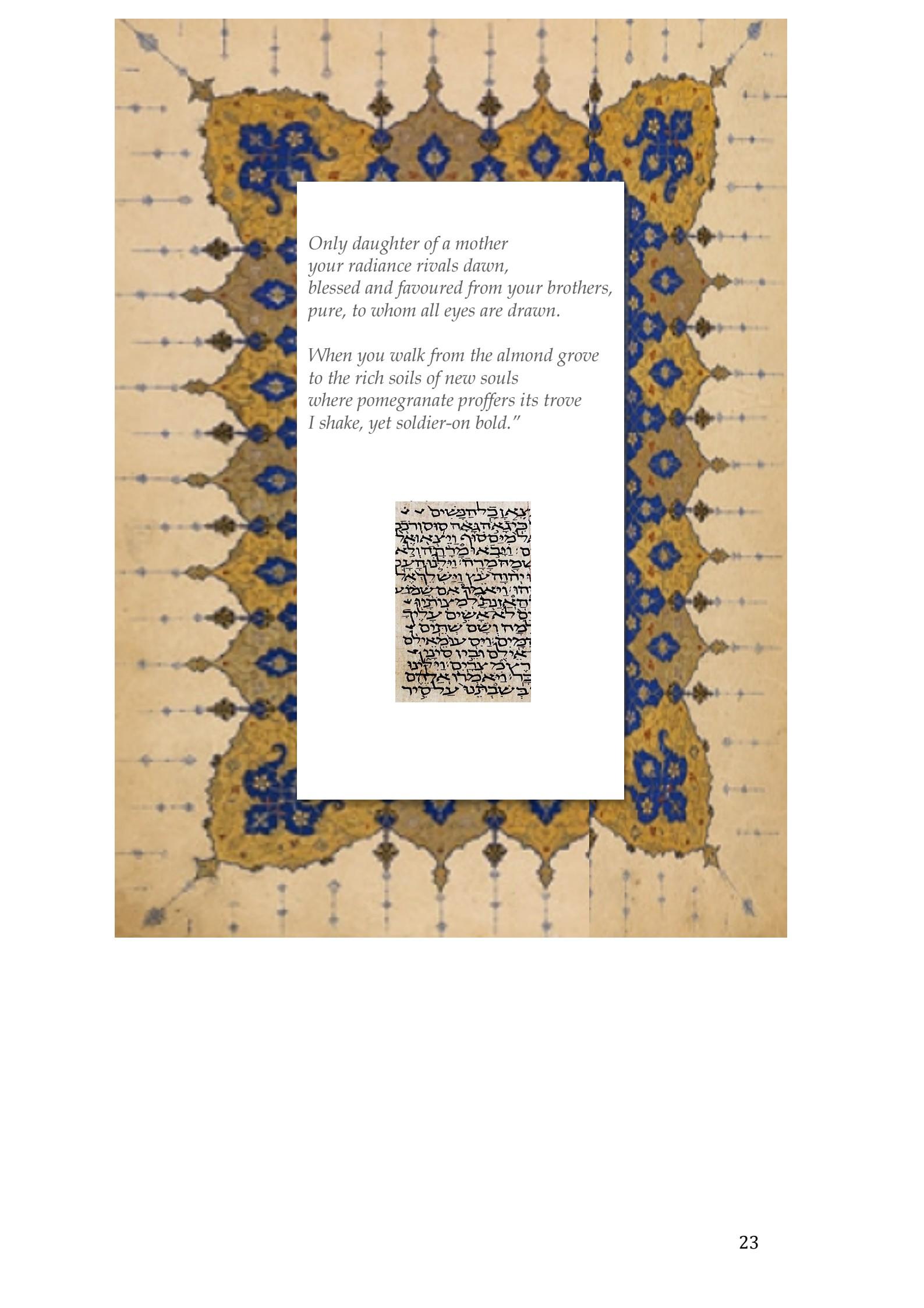
*"He dallies down in the garden,  
in beds of balsamed parsleys,  
where he and I are always one –  
I'm his, he's mine 'midst lilies."*

**THE YOUNG MAN:**

*Across the vale his voice did praise:  
"As deserts' art enraptures,  
thus your grace firm fixes my gaze,  
and I'm completely captured.*

*Your hair is like young playful goats  
on fertile hills of legend,  
and your teeth like lambs shorn of coats,  
perfect twins full and fecund.*

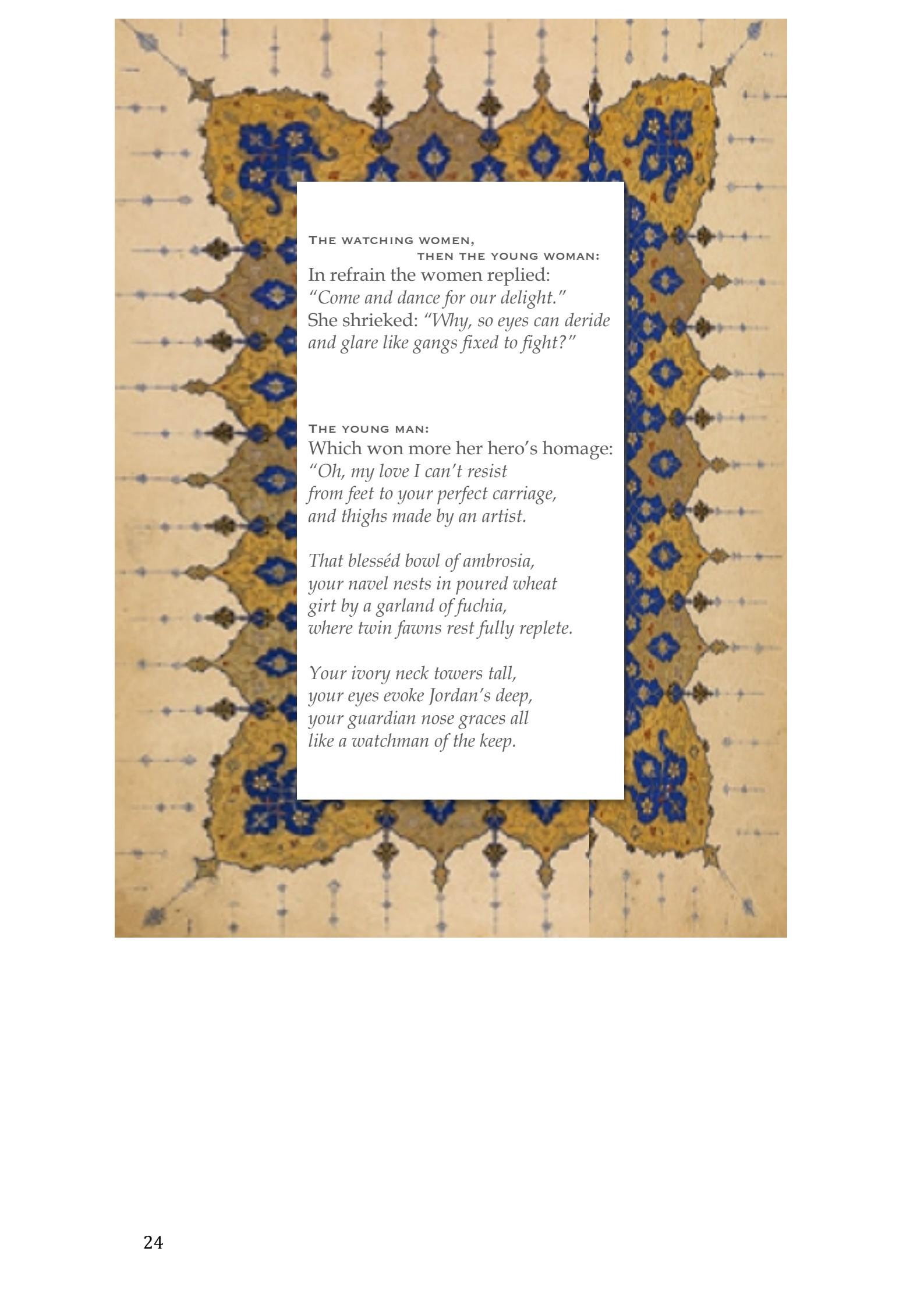
*Your beauty your veil thrusts through!  
Kings have crowds of concubines,  
with a wealth of women to woo,  
yet there's more in my dove enshrined.*



*Only daughter of a mother  
your radiance rivals dawn,  
blessed and favoured from your brothers,  
pure, to whom all eyes are drawn.*

*When you walk from the almond grove  
to the rich soils of new souls  
where pomegranate proffers its trove  
I shake, yet soldier-on bold."*

בְּאֵלֹהֶיךָ מִלְחָמָה כְּבָנָה  
בְּמִסְטָר וַיְגַדֵּל אֶת  
וְבָאוּ לְרֹחֶזֶת  
אֲמָרָה כְּרָה וַיְלַטְּחַלֵּק  
וַיְהִי כְּשָׂרָה וַיְשַׁרְךָ  
וְוַיְאַבְּרַל אֶת שְׁמָנִים  
וְוַיְהִי בְּמִלְחָמָה עַתְּה  
לֹא אֲשִׁם שְׁלִיחָה  
בְּמִרְשָׁם שְׁתִינָה  
וְמִסְפָּסָלָה  
אַלְסָבָיו סְבִיבָה  
כְּאֵלָמָד אֶתְּנָמָן  
בְּשַׁבְּתָתָן עַל סִיר



**THE WATCHING WOMEN,  
THEN THE YOUNG WOMAN:**  
In refrain the women replied:  
*"Come and dance for our delight."*  
She shrieked: *"Why, so eyes can deride  
and glare like gangs fixed to fight?"*

**THE YOUNG MAN:**  
Which won more her hero's homage:  
*"Oh, my love I can't resist  
from feet to your perfect carriage,  
and thighs made by an artist.*

*That blessed bowl of ambrosia,  
your navel nests in poured wheat  
girt by a garland of fuchsia,  
where twin fawns rest fully replete.*

*Your ivory neck towers tall,  
your eyes evoke Jordan's deep,  
your guardian nose graces all  
like a watchman of the keep.*

*Like sacred mount your head's held high  
mantled mauve by filtered light;  
so comely no king dare deny  
that all in you take delight.*

*Fairer than queens are you my sweet,  
slender and straight like date palms;  
you infuse my being with heat  
when date clusters press their charms.*

*Fondling those fruits I dare to taste  
refreshing bunches of grapes  
with aromas of orange laced  
as sweet wine your breath escapes."*



**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

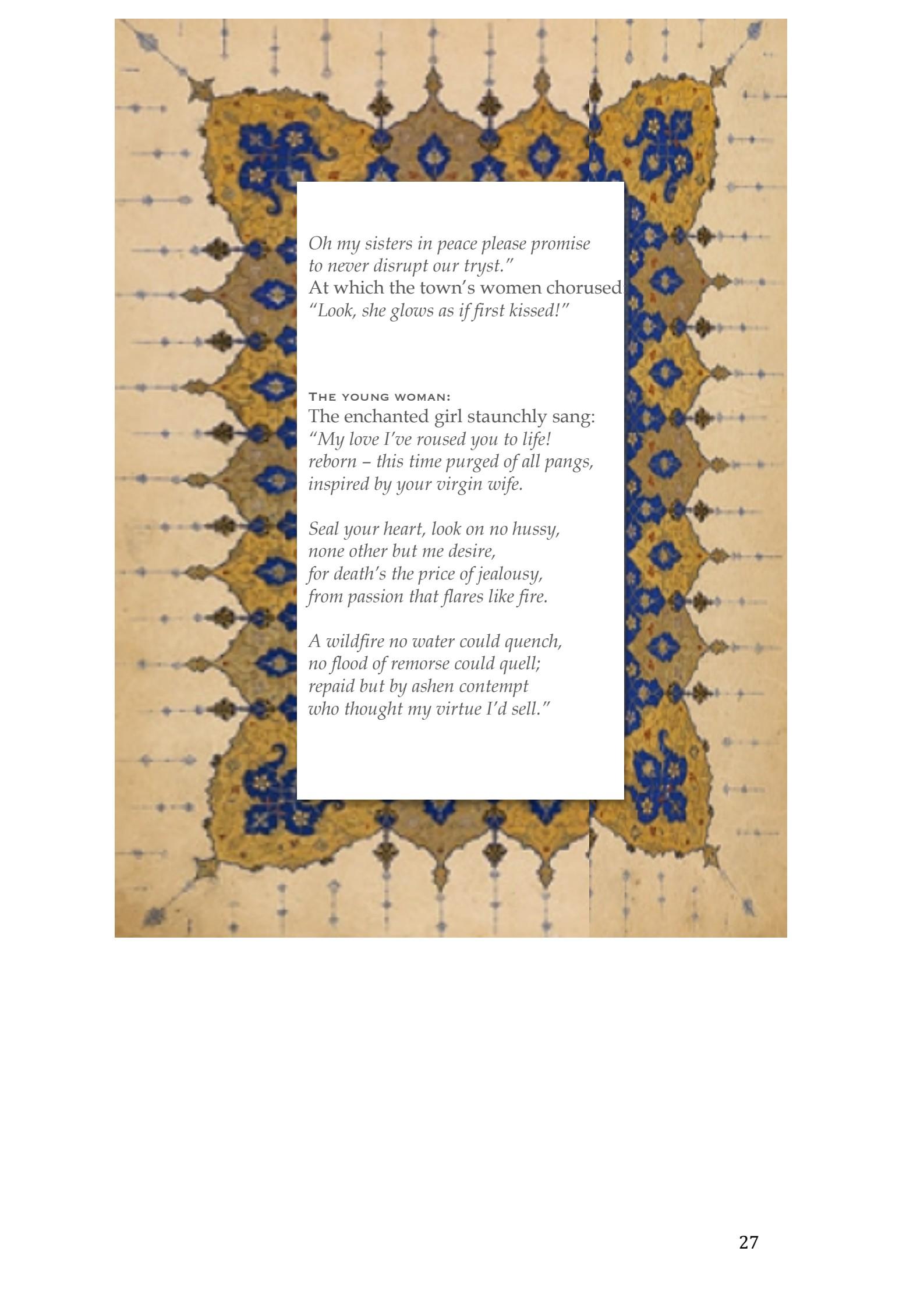
Enraptured, his refrain she reprised:  
*"My wine flows free to your lips  
to lubricate our lullabies,  
for I'm yours, thus my heart skips.*

*Come, let's flee to village and farm,  
rise refreshed with dawn's rosebuds  
opening ripe with childlike charm  
blessing pomegranate's blood.*

*Where magic musk wafts from mandrake  
'midst treasured fare doused in dew;  
my fruits I've kept fresh for our sake  
a cache of gifts old and new."*

*"Oh, why we were not born siblings  
who suckled the self-same breasts,  
I could kiss you without quibbling,  
when we meet in public fests.*

*Then would I take my mother's bed  
where seduced, I'd nought to hide,  
as your left hand cradles my head  
with your right caress my side.*



*Oh my sisters in peace please promise  
to never disrupt our tryst."  
At which the town's women chorused  
"Look, she glows as if first kissed!"*

**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**

The enchanted girl staunchly sang:  
*"My love I've roused you to life!  
reborn – this time purged of all pangs,  
inspired by your virgin wife."*

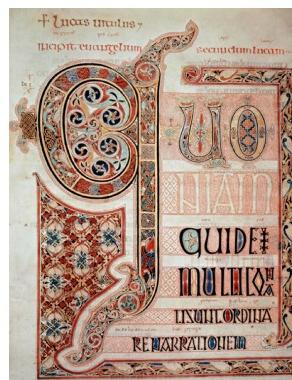
*Seal your heart, look on no hussy,  
none other but me desire,  
for death's the price of jealousy,  
from passion that flares like fire.*

*A wildfire no water could quench,  
no flood of remorse could quell;  
repaid but by ashen contempt  
who thought my virtue I'd sell."*

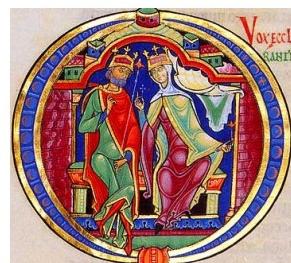
THE WOMAN'S BROTHERS:

Her brooding brothers then cried out:  
*"Our sister's breasts are yet small,  
we can't let her out and about  
when a young man comes to call."*

*"For our precious bird in ardour,  
we'll build a cage argentine,  
wrap her virtue like fine cedar  
by silver plate kept pristine."*



**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**  
Bold beside her lover she states:  
*"A wall am I, my breasts towers,  
I know peace and can see my fate  
can only be love like ours."*



**THE YOUNG WOMAN AND MAN:**  
Lovers then in unison sing:  
*"In vineyards on the best soils,  
with waters sweet and cooling  
is where tireless workers toil.*

*Their rate of return is riches,  
there's plenty, all may partake;  
but our harvest's shared just by us -  
Our Eden we'll ne'er forsake."*

**THE YOUNG WOMAN:**  
And she sang her final song's round:  
*"Come quickly dear, my young hart,  
for mounted on my spicéd mound,  
you are my body and heart."*



